

Message

From: Kaiser, Steven [kaiser.steven@epa.gov]
Sent: 10/2/2017 3:49:47 PM
To: Carla Morgan (cmorgan@eastchicago.com) [cmorgan@eastchicago.com]; Joe Allegretti [Joe@JoeAllegretti.com] [Joe@JoeAllegretti.com]; McCoy, Lisa [LMcCoy@idem.IN.gov]; Beth Admire [badmire@idem.IN.gov]
CC: Garypie, Catherine [garypie.catherine@epa.gov]; Toney, Marcy [tony.marcy@epa.gov]; Kyte, Larry [kyte.larry@epa.gov]; Nelson, Leverett [nelson.leverett@epa.gov]
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Post Tribune East Chicago residents raise issues with pipe replacement plan

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/ct-ptb-east-chicago-pipe-replacement-concerns-st-0929-20170928-story.html>

East Chicago residents raise issues with pipe replacement plan
 Post Tribune, Craig Lyons Sept. 29

Residents are pushing East Chicago to explain its process for replacing lead service lines after people found dirt was being left exposed in the Calumet neighborhood.

Advocacy groups are seeking clarity from East Chicago about its lead service line replacement program after hearing concerns about the limited extent of the work and if it's being done in a way that prevents additional exposure to lead and arsenic in the soil.

The East Chicago Calumet Coalition Community Advisory Group raised questions with the city, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state about the lead service line replacement process and soil that's being dug up and left on the ground, as residents are concerned that material is contaminated.

"This is problematic because residents do not know whether the excavated soil is contaminated and to their knowledge nothing is being done to test that material or characterize the material for waste-disposal purposes," the group wrote in a letter to the city.

East Chicago Mayor Anthony Copeland said in a statement that the city and its contractors are in compliance with all the guidelines and regulations from the Indiana Department of Environmental Management and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"Even though the EPA has not required it, the city is requiring that all dirt, sand and concrete be placed in separate metal dumpster containers, and all material tarped over," Copeland said. "In addition, the city is investigating the possibility of relining the service line pipe, which is far less intrusive since it does not require any excavation and can be done with less inconvenience to the homeowner."

Starting in September, the city began replacing lead service lines, which connect the main to residents' homes, in an effort to better protect people from potential lead exposure through the water. The city has said the process will take time, with a target of completing work at 400 homes by May.

The city is starting with service lines replacement in the Superfund site, according to an email, and doing work elsewhere in the city following other construction projects. The city is replacing all the existing pipe, according to an email, and not simply lining the pipe.

The Natural Resources Defense Council asked that the pipe replacement is expanded to the entire city as it is estimated 90 percent of East Chicago homes have lead service lines.

"Given the cumulative exposures of lead and other toxic chemicals faced by the entire community, we believe that a commitment to replace all the lead service lines in the city should be made," Anjali Waikar and Meleah Geertsma, of the NRDC, wrote to the mayor.

The city has said citywide pipe replacement will happen as funding is available, according to an email, and is starting with a focus on the Superfund site.

The NRDC joined the community advisory group with raising concerns about potentially contaminated soil being exposed during the pipe replacement.

The group is asking that the city provide sampling data to show the material is not contaminated and not putting residents and the neighborhoods at risk.

"The city also should address how it intends to handle soil (including at properties located outside of the Superfund site) that may be disrupted by the lead service line replacement process, particularly given recent concerns regarding the handling of soil during the service line replacement process at sites located on the USS Superfund site," Waikar and Geertsma wrote.

The EPA, in a letter to the community advisory group, said its sampling data and analysis show that the yards where the pipes are being replaced this year did not show any signs of contamination. The EPA added that the soil being dug from beneath the roads or sidewalks have not shown elevated levels of contamination.

"If East Chicago asserts that the soil is not contaminated, it must share with the residents and the public at large the sampling data or other information for each section of street involved that supports that conclusion," the group wrote. "To the extent that East Chicago has any uncertainty regarding the safety of the soil, we urge you to swiftly contain the excavated soil and immediately commence testing adequate to characterize the soil, with the assistance of state and federal agencies if necessary."